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THE BOOK REVIEW

Saga of the Politics of Heroin

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Times Book Critic

President Nixon's recent statement that he would cut off military and economic aid to any government which protected drug traffic, with his singling out the Central Intelligence Agency for what he termed a "superb" performance in fighting the international drug trade, seemed designed as a commentary on *THE POLITICS OF HEROIN IN SOUTHEAST ASIA* (Harper & Row: \$10.95) by Alfred W. McCoy with Cathleen B. Reed and Leonard P. Adams.

The form of the work, understated, scholarly and meticulously documented, is in contrast with the subject matter. Drug smuggling, gangsters, corruption, are more often the themes of suspense novels and hyped-up journalistic exposes.

Indeed, some of the points made here have been made before. Seventy percent of the heroin produced in the world originates in the "Golden Triangle" where Laos, Thailand and Burma meet. People high in the government of South Vietnam have joined others in the government of the other three countries are involved in protecting every stage of the process.

First Time

But this is the first time that so complete and careful a study has been published. This is not only the result of library research but of extensive interview and field work. Many of the people who supplied incidents and inside information, students, past and present government officials,

law enforcement personnel and journalists, have had to remain anonymous. But there is no anonymity for those involved in the production, processing and distribution of heroin. If their names are known and their activities documented, they are given.

It is no accident, given so convincing a framework, that the book was attacked by the CIA prior to publication and President Nixon saw fit to make his comments. In fact, in a certain way his statement on cutting off aid is at least an acknowledgement that much of what is written in this book about the history of drugs and politics in Southeast Asia is true.

Foreign Aid

"If America's lavish foreign aid and military assistance programs cannot be used positively to force the governments of Laos, Thailand, and South Vietnam to get out of the opium business, then logic would seem to dictate that an immediate cessation of foreign aid might bring about the desired results. . . . A cutoff in foreign aid and military assistance might finally convince these governments that the United States is really serious about ending the heroin traffic," the authors write.

" . . . 1972 is shaping up as the year of decision for the international narcotics traffic . . . If President Nixon is reelected he will probably continue his policy of giving unqualified support to President Thieu's administration in South Vietnam and to the right-wing governments

in Thailand and Laos. As long as there is no serious threat of a cutoff in foreign aid or a withdrawal of political support, these governments cannot be subjected to any serious pressure and the narcotics traffic will continue unabated."

One does not have to accept this as the only option. What cannot be shrugged off is that since the end of World War II, the opium boom shifted eastward. The authors give a fascinating history of heroin as a "miracle drug" which turned out to be a curse, of the underworld entry into the narcotics traffic, of a policy of "clandestine realpolitik" in which the underworld and the CIA made mutually effective local alliances,

and beyond that where the syndicate or Mafia dealt with local anti-Communist leaders who were either financing their movements through the drug trade or lining their own pockets. From the French experience in Indochina to our own, the drug pattern emerged and grew. Pressures on the opium sources of the Middle East and Turkey made the Southeast Asia opium boom. Wartime conditions allowed the crops and laboratory processing to function by paying out vast sums.

A Chinese Nationalist general left without funds by his government, Tuan Shi-wen, ". . . To fight the evil of Communism . . . you must have an army, and an army must have guns, and to buy guns you must have money. In these mountains the only money is opium."

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